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ABSTRACT

Consequences of the first allocation of public aid to independent schools in British Columbia in 1979 and 1980 were explored in this study. Interviews and questionnaires were used to query principals, education committee (or school board) members in private schools, and superintendents and presidents of teachers' associations in public schools. Three high officials of independent school associations were also interviewed. Findings (which are considered only tentative) suggest that the effects of British Columbia's program of aid to independent schools have been overwhelmingly positive, although some independent school leaders have expressed discomfort and worry about the accompanying regulatory procedures. Overall morale in insolvent independent schools apparently has been raised. The most affluent schools have been the most cautious about becoming dependent on the aid, using it almost entirely for scholarships, but more insolvent schools have readily allocated the funds for basic operating expenses, making it unlikely that they could withdraw from the program. There is little evidence of notable effects of the program on public schools, although public school leaders are fearful of enrollment loss, particularly of brighter students. A future study will look at effects on the social climate of schools. (Author/JM)

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SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF PROVINCIAL AID TO INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA*

Cathaleene J. Macias and Donald A. Erickson

In the fall of 1978, public aid became available to independent schools in British Columbia. While most other Canadian provinces had provided monetary aid to independent schools for many years, and had often maintained fully funded denominational systems, the provision of provincial funds to schools not part of the public system was unprecedented in British Columbia. During the first year in which independent schools received grants (1978-79), the aid averaged approximately $500 per pupil. In the second year (1979-80), the average rose to approximately $625 per pupil. There was, understandably, a great deal of concern and apprehension about how public grants to independent schools would affect both independent and public schools in the province.

For many years preceding the passage of Bill 33, The Independent Schools Support Act, in British Columbia, there were controversies within the province concerning independent school status. At a time when the public school system was experiencing a continual decrease in student enrollment, as well as public criticism of the quality of education it offered, independent schools within the province were gaining public recognition and student applications. The provision of public aid to independent schools came, then, at a time of growing tension between public schools and independent schools. It was important to document these first few years of public funding, not only to

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determine what effects the new government action had on the educational system of British Columbia, but also to determine what influence public and independent school reactions would have on future funding policy.

The findings described in this report are from projects that were part of a much larger study of British Columbia's program of aid to independent schools. The overall study is entitled Consequences of Funding Independent Schools and is usually referred to as the "COFIS" study. The purpose of COFIS is to investigate the background and current and anticipated effects, in a broad range of areas, of public funding for independent schools in British Columbia. The data reported here are from three specific activities within COFIS. One set of data is from a key informant interviews conducted in the spring of 1979 with 78 individuals in British Columbia who were particularly well qualified to observe the consequences of the first allocation of provincial funds to independent schools. The opinions and perceptions of these key individuals will be compared to the opinions and perceptions of a different sample of public and independent school administrators who responded to a questionnaire survey in the spring of 1980, two years after independent schools were first funded. Finally, we will report the results of interviews with three particularly prominent independent school association officials during December, 1980.

Research Design

The basic sampling frame for the selection of the 78 key informants interviewed during the late spring of 1979 involved choosing particular independent schools from within independent school associations in a way that would obtain a sample fairly representative of the characteristics of

all schools within each association. For instance, when sampling Catholic schools within the province, we tried to obtain a group of schools that had approximately the same range in enrolments, the same range in age since founding, and the same geographical distribution as all Catholic schools. The principal and an educational committee (or board) member from each sample school were then invited to participate as key informants.

A similar sampling procedure was followed for public school districts, except that these districts were selected on the bases of density of population (urban-suburban) and number of funded independent schools within public school boundaries. An effort was made to obtain a sample of public school districts that were highly populated and had a wide range in the number of funded independent schools operating within their areas, including some districts with no independent schools. The superintendent of each school district and the president of the local teachers' association were then invited to act as key informants for the project.

In addition, the executive board members of the Federation of Independent School Associations were asked to act as key informants, along with the president, and sometimes other key officials, of the individual independent school associations. These key informants were relied upon to give an overall picture of the effects of public funding to independent schools, distinct from the perspectives of individual school administrators.

Each key informant was interviewed by a trained interviewer using an open-ended, conversational format. Although interviewers followed a set of questions designed specifically for either independent school principals, public school principals, or school association executives, each key informant was allowed to address subjects of his/her own choosing and to approach

particular topics in his/her own manner. All but two of the key informant interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The preparation of the data followed a procedure designed to insure the confidentiality of the respondents. The interview transcriptions were first compared to their original tape-recordings in order to correct any errors in transcription and to insure word-for-word accuracy. Each transcription was then given a code number by the project director, rather than a person or school label, in order to prevent the identification of either the respondent or the respondent's association with a particular school. These code numbers were assigned before data analysis so that the project staff was blind to the identity of any individual key informant.

The interview transcripts were analyzed in the following way:

(1) Each key informant's responses were coded for those questions from his interview schedule which could be answered by the selection of a certain pre-determined category of response, such as "yes" or "no."

(2) Other statements by the informant which were not elicited by a specific question from the interview schedule, but which were related to the issue of independent school funding and which could be easily categorized, were also coded as categorical responses.

(3) Those comments by each respondent which served to explain categorical answers were recorded verbatim along with the corresponding categorical codes and then grouped with other key informants' comments according to common themes and topics.

(4) Finally, those comments which were spontaneous and unsolicited, but not immediately classifiable were content-analyzed in the following manner:

(a) All responses were recorded verbatim without any identifying code numbers.

(b) The responses were then placed into categories and subcategories.

(c) This categorization was reviewed for consistency and meaningfulness, and the responses were then labeled with category and respondent codes.

The responses of key informants from the same independent school or public school district were compared for consistency, and, if there was disagreement on relevant issues, this inconsistency was reported.

The sample from which the questionnaire data were derived in the spring of 1980 must be described frankly as fortuitous. In connection with the 1980 survey discussed in Erickson's paper ("Effects of Public Money on Social Climates in Independent Schools: A Preliminary Report"), a set of items concerning the perceived effects of public aid to independent schools was included in the questionnaires submitted to heads of public and independent schools. Usable data were obtained from the heads of 50 independent schools, approximately 40 percent of the intended sample, and from 15 heads of public schools, roughly 25 percent of the intended sample. Not only are the response rates low, but we have no idea at this stage whether participation was notably biased. Consequently, findings based on this source of data must be regarded as very tentative.

The interviews in December, 1980, were conducted by the principal investigator of the study (Erickson) with the three most prominent executives of independent school associations in British Columbia. These interviews, largely unstructured, explored the perceptions of these executives

concerning the major consequences of British Columbia's aid to independent schools.

Nature of This Report

Detailed reports will be released later concerning the perceptions of key informants relating to the consequences of aid to independent schools in British Columbia. This paper will focus on the most notable tendencies in the comments of school heads and other key informants whose perceptions were probed in the spring of 1979, the spring of 1980, and Decmeber, 1980. We begin with data from the spring of 1979 and 1980.

Effects of Public Funding on the Budgets and Functions of Independent Schools

For the vast majority of independent schools, the receipt of public funds reportedly did not mean a dramatic change in operating budgets. It made the jeopardy of threatened existence less severe and created optimism that the schools would be able to excel in their educational goals. In our 1979 key informant study, public funding was reported by the individual school administrators to have served one or more of the following purposes in their schools:

(1) First of all, public funding assured financial survival in instances where independent schools had been in severe jeopardy, and eased the financial burden of meeting day to day expenses in those schools whose budgets were adequate, but very limited. Most schools participating in the provincial aid reported that, while public funding was greatly appreciated and needed, it did little to increase their overall budget. None of the Catholic schools in our key informant sample reduced its tuition for the first year

of public funding, and non-Catholic independent schools reduced their tuition on the average only 10 percent. In the spring of 1980 (ignoring inflation), 84 percent of our survey respondents from independent schools reported they had still not reduced their tuitions, and 35 percent of these had continued to increase student tuitions. All key informant sample schools reported that they remained dependent on sources of income other than tuition and public aid. There is some evidence that the receipt of public funds may actually have hurt the independent schools to some extent. In 1980, several of the independent schools in our sample reported that donations to their school had decreased as a result of their receiving public funding. However, 93 percent of the responding school heads indicated that they had not been able to decrease their efforts to raise funds despite the supplementary income from the government.

(2) The second way independent schools reportedly used government funding was to improve classroom instruction. In 1979, almost every school that participated in the public aid had reportedly used public funds to improve and expand its course curriculum, or for more educational materials, for new staffing, or (indirectly, since to do so directly was illegal) for new facilities, such as the addition of a library or science laboratory. In the spring of 1980, two-thirds of our sample of independent school administrators reported a significant improvement in the quality of instruction they were now able to provide.

(3) A third way B.C. independent schools used public monies was to reward and compensate teachers through salary raises. In fact, <u>all</u> key informants in our 1979 sample of Catholic schools indicated that their school's highest priority for use of the funds was to increase teacher

salaries. In some schools, all the public funds went toward salary increases. In all the sample Catholic schools, most (if not all) of the public money was used in this way. The salary increases given to Catholic school teachers by the schools in our sample were substantial, generally varying from 15% to 75%. Most were in the 25% to 50% range. While raises had been given in previous years, they had been small in comparison.

In contrast, non-Catholic schools in our 1979 sample that were participating in the aid provided teacher salary increases of 10% to 15% on the average for the first year of funding. These salary raises were in line with increases made during the years preceding public funding and did not represent a large allocation of public funds. These non-Catholic independent schools reported that, as much as possible, they had distributed public funds over their various expenditure categories so no one area of the budget would become dependent on government funding. No substantial salary increases or other long-term commitments were made with the public funds which would be hard to maintain without the public funds.

The 1980 survey results paralleled these findings, with more Catholic than non-Catholic independent schools reporting that their teacher salaries had increased at a faster rate since the receipt of public funds in 1978. A remarkable 97 percent of the Catholic school sample in 1978 had increased teacher salaries significantly, while 66 percent of the non-Catholic sample had done so. Because a majority of the 1980 sample of non-Catholic funded schools reported that teacher salaries had increased at a faster rate since funding, these schools may be exercising less caution, allocating public funds in a manner that indicates long-term commitments.

(4) Finally, in wealthier schools, public funds were used to provide

more scholarships and bursaries for students, according to data in 1979 and 1980. Public funding was small in comparison to the per-pupil expenses of the high-tuition, secular schools, so there were few significant changes in curriculum or program development resulting from public funding. Since the high-tuition schools represent a very small percentage of independent schools in British Columbia, and yet are often the stereotype of what an independent school is assumed to be, it is important to point out that the response of these schools to public funding was apparently very different from that of the majority of independent schools within the province.

While the financial impact of public funding on individual school budgets was clearly evidenced in both 1979 key informant and 1980 survey reports, a more subtle, psychological impact was also stressed by our respondents. In many independent schools, the decision of whether or not to apply for public funding involved a great deal of soul-searching and discussion. Those schools which did decide to accept public funding were then faced with the task of setting priorities for the allocation of funds. For many independent schools, the first two years of public funding reportedly represented a time of growth and close interpersonal involvement.

Within Catholic schools, there was general consensus that public funding should be accepted, and general consensus in how public funds should be spent. Every key informant from our sample of Catholic schools reported that both the school board and parents in their school almost unanimously felt an increase in teacher salaries would be the most important use of public funds. The most common reason given by our key informants for this financial priority was appreciation of teacher commitment and recognition

of this commitment as essential to Catholic school existence. This initial decision--to allocate public funds toward teacher salary increases--was reported to have influenced the Catholic school communities in two important respects. First, the consensus in setting priorities reflected cohesion and cooperation among school teachers, parents and board members, and this realization that the school community was in harmony had a positive influence on school morale. Secondly, the recognition and appreciation given to teacher commitment was reported to have increased the value placed by the schools on all individual dedication and service. In response, both teachers and parents allegedly felt more value in their own contributions and, in some instances, reportedly increased their efforts and service to their school.

The results of our survey in the spring of 1980 indicated that these positive personal relationships had not been undermined by a continued reliance upon public funds. Only one Catholic school administrator in our sample saw a decrease in either teacher dedication or parent involvement since the receipt of public funds. Twenty-four percent of the Catholic school sample reported an increase in teacher dedication, and 20 percent reported an increase in parent dedication.

Within non-Catholic, but church-related schools, the initial decision of whether or not to apply for public funding was reported by our key informants to have elicited strong opinions and many fears of government interference. Even among those parents, teachers and board members who favored public funding, there was anxiety that public money might be accompanied by government regulation and control. The final decision of most qualified schools was to accept public funding with the understanding that it would be discontinued if government regulations infringed upon a school's religious

goals or activities. A recurring theme in all the non-Catholic, church-related school interviews was the vigilance and caution that these independent school administrators exercised in their routine interactions with the provincial authorities. While leaders in almost all of these sample schools were satisfied with the manner in which public funding had been administered during this first year, they all expressed concern about whether they would be allowed to maintain this same degree of autonomy in the future. Increased attention by the non-Catholic, church-related schools to the maintenance of school values and religious curricula was evidenced in the formalization of admission policies which screened out non-religious applicants, and in the organized efforts of teachers, within religious teachers' associations, to design and implement religious instruction throughout their entire course curricula. Because they were concerned that they might lose their religious freedom by accepting public funds, these independent schools reportedly developed a stronger sense of identity as religious institutions.

By the spring of 1980, non-Catholic independent schools reportedly had not reduced their concern over potential government interference. Only two of our survey respondents from these schools said they now had a more favorable attitude toward government regulation of independent schools. By contrast, one-third of our sample of Catholic school administrators indicated a more favorable attitude toward government regulation since the receipt of public funds. Moreover, one-fourth of the non-Catholic schools in our survey felt that freedom to run their schools as they would prefer had, indeed, been reduced, compared to one-tenth of the Catholic school sample. Nevertheless, government regulation reportedly had not been allowed to interfere with the religious purposes in either of these two groups of church-related schools,

Catholic and non-Catholic. A stronger church and school affiliation was reported by one-fourth of our 1980 non-Catholic independent school administrators and by one-sixth of our Catholic school administrators, while no independent school head reported that relations between church and school became more distant during these first two years of funding. All of the church-related independent school respondents reported that religion remained just as prominent in their school activities as it had been before funding.

One perception of the effects of public funding shared by many independent school respondents both in 1979 and 1980 was that public opinion toward independent schools had improved as a result of provincial funding. Some key informants suggested that public respect had increased as a result of the legal recognition now given to independent schools through public funding. Other respondents felt that the appropriation of government money to independent schools in and of itself had caused the public to infer that independent schools now had government approval. Survey results revealed that, as of spring of 1980, many independent school administrators still felt that funding had had a positive effect on public opinion. In spite of the continuing antagonism of public school teachers toward independent school funding, 27 percent of our sample of independent school administrators said they thought negative criticism of private schools had declined since the onset of public funding. By contrast, only 2 percent of these same administrators believed that negative criticism of public schools had also declined during the previous two years.

This negative assessment of public opinion toward the public school system was pervasive in the responses of public school administrators

themselves in both the 1979 key informant and 1980 questionnaire samples. In fact, 43 percent of the public school administrators in the 1980 survey believed that public criticism of their schools had increased since the funding of independent schools. The 1979 key informant responses made it clear that some public school administrators felt it was the provision of funds to independent schools that was endangering public school status and threatening public school survival.

Effects of Public Funding for Independent Schools on Public School Enrollments

The public school administrators in our 1979 key informant study discussed two major changes in the enrollment policies of independent schools that they feared might result from public funding. One of these hypothetical changes was that government funding would draw public attention to the availability of alternative education, and the public schools would lose students to independent schools. Since public schools are funded on the basis of student enrollments, this loss could severely damage public school budgets. The second hypothesized change was that public aid would reduce funded schools' dependence on student tuition and allow them to become more academically selective in their admissions. An increased selectivity on the part of independent schools would necessarily result in a predominance of academically inferior children in the public schools.

While the public school administrators in our 1979 key informant sample generally shared the philosophy that religious and ethnic alternatives to the public school system should exist, they did not see the majority of independent schools as providing an alternative equal in quality to the public school system. There was disagreement and indecision among these public

school administrators over whether the public funds would improve the quality of education in independent schools. Some degree of resentment toward the public funding of independent schools was reported by the key informants to exist in the public schools, particularly in the two sample districts that had lost students to independent schools. However, in the majority of school districts from which leaders were interviewed, reportedly there had been "no discernible effects" as a result of independent school funding, and one district responded that the increase in students it had received from independent schools constituted a "discernible effect." This majority response is interesting because, although there was a prevalent feeling that the public funding was unfair and placed the public school system at a disadvantage, there was also a hesitancy on the part of public school administrators to point a finger at negative consequences or to pass a quick judgment on the merit of funding independent schools. Most public school superintendents specifically expressed a "wait-and-see" attitude.

In the survey conducted in the spring of 1980, public school administrators again expressed a general consensus that public funding for independent schools had not produced notable consequences. On all but one of the survey questions, a majority of public administrators responded that things had stayed "about the same" since funding began in 1978. (The one question for which a majority of respondents indicated they felt change had occurred concerned criticism of public schools. Forty percent of the respondents felt that negative criticism of public schools had increased, but a few respondents actually said they felt criticism had declined.) Only one-third of the respondents felt that independent schools had received more attention from the news media, or saw more competition between public and private

schools. Moreover, just a third of the public school administrators felt there had been an increase in the number of public school students transferring to independent schools, and only a single respondent felt the public schools were now losing a higher calibre of student to independent schools. It is interesting to note that, although a similar percentage of respondents indicated that they saw change in response to several of the questionnaire items, these percentages were not usually comprised of the same individuals. Therefore, we cannot conclude that a certain number of our sample consistently reported that they saw change as a result of public funding. In fact, 80 percent of the public school respondents indicated they felt things had "stayed about the same" on at least half of the questionnaire items. Therefore, even though public schools may remain opposed to the public funding of independent schools, it appears from our survey data that a majority of public school administrators do not believe that the funding has had a major overall effect on the public school system, at least not as of the spring of 1980.

This view of our survey respondents was corroborated by our key informant reports from school administrators in provincially funded independent schools. First of all, according to independent school key informants, a loss of students from public schools to independent schools had not occurred to any extent as a result of public funding by the end of the 1978-79 school year. The majority of provincially funded independent school leaders in our key informant sample reported that they had received an increase in parent inquiries and student applications during this first year of funding. However, in general, these applications did not suddenly begin coming in, but had been steadily increasing ever since the early 1970's. For this reason, the respondents did not link the increase in student applications to public

funding, but rather to a growing parental concern with their children's education. Moreover, the increase in applications to independent schools did not always result in an increase in student enrollment. In fact, most of the sample independent schools did not increase their student enrollments substantially by the end of the first year. There were two primary reasons given during the interviews for this reluctance to expand enrollments. First, because many funded schools preferred not to become dependent on public funding, very few schools used public funds, even indirectly, to help them expand their facilities. In general, there was not adequate space in most independent schools for a substantial number of new students. The second reason given by key informants for not expanding their student enrollments was their belief that a school can best serve its students' needs when it remains a small community of well-acquainted individuals who share similar values. For this reason, many independent schools in our sample made efforts to strengthen the homogeneity of their parent-student populations during the first year of public funding. Perhaps even more significant, many parents who made inquiries of independent schools withdrew their applications when informed of the tuition fees or the requirements for parental support. In the opinion of the 1980 independent school key informants, public funding did not draw a large number of students away from public schools in the first year of funding.

The questionnaire survey of independent school administrators in the spring of 1980 showed differing opinions of the impact of public aid in some respects. Over half the total sample of independent school respondents now saw independent schools as attracting more attention from the news media, but the perception of whether aid had increased the number of students who

were transferring from public to independent schools was different for Catholic and non-Catholic school respondents. While only one-fourth of the Catholic school administrators saw a greater loss of students from public to private schools since the receipt of aid--a percentage that was smaller than the one-third public administrators who shared the same opinion--nearly one-half of the non-Catholic schools reported an increase, with almost half also reporting that their own student enrollments had increased significantly since 1978. A much larger percentage of non-Catholic than Catholic school administrators reported a significant growth in their student waiting lists, and more non-Catholic than Catholic school administrators reported an increase in parental pressure to expand. While one-third of the Catholic school respondents reported having increased the amount of published material they distributed to parents or the public, one-half of the non-Catholic school respondents reported an increase in such fliers and information. Therefore, we might infer from our findings that the loss of students from public to private reported by some public school administrators could have been caused primarily by students entering the non-Catholic independent schools during the second year of public funding. Because the total number of funded Catholic independent schools is much larger than the total number of funded non-Catholic independent schools in British Columbia, the loss of students by public schools has not yet been reported to be dramatic.

The second hypothesized result of public funding--that independent schools would become more academically selective in their enrollments--was not evidenced in the majority of funded schools by the end of the first year of funding, according to the independent school key informants. What did occur in many independent schools was an increase in <u>religious</u> selectivity.

This selectivity primarily focused on parental philosophy and religious beliefs, rather than denominational affiliation. In fact, most representatives of funded schools reported they had become more interdenominational over the years. Faced with the threat of government interference with their religious educational objectives, many independent schools were being careful to maintain a parent and student community dedicated to religious goals. As a result, there were no significant changes reported in the religious or philosophical make-up of the students in funded schools.

The results of the questionnaire survey conducted a year later provided similar findings. In the spring of 1980, 94 percent of our sample of funded independent school administrators felt that the distinctiveness of their individual school had either been maintained or become more pronounced since the receipt of public aid. Ninety percent of our sample of Catholic school administrators shared the public school administrators' view that a higher calibre of students were not being attracted to independent schools, and three-fourths of our sample of non-Catholic independent school administrators indicated they believed public-to-independent-school transfers were of the same academic calibre as in the years before funding. Once again, it was the non-Catholic independent schools which reported the greatest change in student enrollment. However, the majority of all independent school respondents in this 1980 survey said that their own student bodies had not changed appreciably, either in size or in academic potential.

Possibly the strongest argument made by our key informants against academic selectivity was that it is only in regard to their particular educational philosophies that independent schools distinguish themselves in purpose from public schools. While individual independent schools may

strive for academic excellence, the majority aim at providing an education that is a religious or philosophical alternative to the public school system.

In summary, our 1979 key informant interviews and 1980 survey data suggest that public funding has been primarily a positive experience, both financially and psychologically, for the independent schools in our sample receiving government grants. The public school system has experienced a continuing decrease in student enrollments, but a majority of our public school respondents do not believe that the funding of independent schools has had an overall effect on the public school system. However, the reader should be cautioned that the opinions we have reported may not be representative of the opinions of all school administrators in British Columbia. In neither the 1979 key informant study nor the 1980 questionnaire survey were we able to obtain a random, stratified sample of independent or public school administrators. While the key informant sample does appear to be a representative cross-section of independent school administrators, the questionnaire sample necessarily included only those administrators who were cooperative enough to return their questionnaires.

Interviews in December, 1980

In December, 1980, as we indicated earlier, the principal investigator of this study of consequences of aid to independent schools (Erickson) conducted unstructured personal interviews with the three most prominent executives of independent school associations in British Columbia, seeking to elicit opinions concerning the effects of public assistance on the province's independent schools. With few exceptions, these association executives confirmed the tendencies reported in the key informant interviews of 1979 and

the questionnaire responses in the spring of 1980. However, they shed additional light on the topic.

The provincial aid program, the three leaders agreed, was considerably less controversial at the end of 1980 than at its inception, more than two years earlier. Some groups of independent schools that refused the aid initially were now pondering a change in their position. Leaders were receiving few letters and phone calls from parents and others who were worried about negative consequences of the aid. The Federation of Independent School Associations, the main lobbying group for independent school interests, was pressing hard for increases in the level of aid, for a liberal interpretation of the requirement that schools must be in existence for five years before they could qualify, and for a more generous policy on enumerating students for the per-pupil fund allocations. However, the current Minister of Education was quoted as predicting that regulations would increase if the level of aid were raised.

There were important differences among independent school groups in their current postures toward provincial aid. The high-tuition schools seemed the most wary, urging that the aid not be increased beyond the current level (30 percent of per-pupil operating expenses in public schools) lest baleful consequences follow. Other school leaders were willing to see the level of assistance raised gradually to 50 or 66 percent, but had objected to some regulatory tendencies in the past and foresaw the possibility that new regulations might induce them to withdraw from the aid program. Not much worry was detectable among Catholic school leaders, who were urging that the aid be increased, little by little, until it reached at least 80 or 90 percent, and who described as "helpful" some provincial

influences that prompted objections from leaders of other independent school groups.

One provincial influence to which some independent school leaders had objected was an "Administrative Handbook" which specified in great detail the minutes per day to be allocated to various subject-matter areas. In the face of objections, provincial officials reportedly revised the handbook. (We will inquire into this issue in greater detail.) Some independent school leaders were worried, as well, about the province's "learning assessment program," an attempt to identify areas of weakness in schools by administering and analyzing standardized achievement tests. The first wave of assessment data from independent schools was gathered in the spring of 1980. Some independent school leaders objected to provincial reports which said that independent schools were "as good as public schools of similar size at this grade level." The leaders insisted that public schools should not be regarded as the standard against which independent schools were evaluated, since independent schools were attempting to do something different.

Outside the Catholic school sector, there appeared to be considerable concern about the regulations that might be imposed if the New Democratic Party, a left-wing political group, were to win the election that must be held within two years. NDP leaders had promised that they would not fundamentally change the program of aid to independent schools, except for "human rights considerations." NDP leaders had refused to specify what they meant by "human rights considerations," but independent school leaders suspected that regulations affecting the admission of students and the hiring of teachers might be involved.

One of the three leaders interviewed discussed ways in which

administrative procedures for independent schools had been affected by the aid program. He described a greater emphasis on "efficiency" and "tight operation," apparently intended to make a good impression upon the provincial evaluation teams that regularly visit independent schools participating in the aid. He suggested that we consult independent school principals on this topic, as indeed we plan to do.

Independent schools, the three leaders agreed, had experienced considerable growth since the advent of the aid program, though it was difficult to know how much of this growth was attributable to the aid, since much growth had also occurred in other parts of Canada and the U.S. during the same period. In the Calvinist schools, there was no clear sign that the aid had triggered more of a demand for student places, since the demand had previously been growing as part of an international pattern in Canada and the United States. However, the aid had influenced the supply of student spaces in the Calvinist schools by releasing funds that could be used for expansion. Most enrollment increases were related to the addition of one or two grades in a number of schools, although two schools (the ones in Victoria and Vancouver) had experienced an approximate doubling of their enrollment. In Catholic schools, it appeared that both the supply side and the demand side of the equation had been affected by the aid. During the first two years of the aid, the demand had not increased dramatically, perhaps because it took time to overcome the pessimism that had afflicted many Catholic schools previously. At the beginning of the third year, however, there was a surge in the demand for Catholic schools. At the same time, the inflow of public aid released funds to make expansion possible and increased the willingness of Catholic leaders to invest in expansion, improvement, and the building of new

schools. At least five, and perhaps as many as ten, new Catholic schools are predicted for the coming decade.

In Catholic schools, which have generally used the major proportion of the new aid to increase teacher salaries, doubling them (or more) in some schools, there are suggestions that a self-reinforcing dynamic has been created, for there is reportedly an urgent need to increase the salaries even further, and thus to obtain more liberal public aid to make these increases possible.

The aid program has reportedly had the effect in virtually all independent school groups of fostering new ferment and excitement. In schools that were previously afflicted with a loss of confidence in the future, survival now seems virtually guaranteed, so energies can now be poured into improvements. In schools that previously were functioning on an even keel, strenuous new efforts have been made to preserve their distinctive features. New resources are now available for planning, coordination, and public relations.

Summary

We have presented data from three sources (interviews in the spring of 1979, questionnaires in the spring of 1980, and interviews in December, 1980) relating to the perceptions of school leaders concerning the impact of British Columbia's program of aid to independent schools. We do not claim that the data necessarily represent anything more than perceptions, though it seems unreasonable to assume that the consistent themes in these perceptions are generally untrustworthy, except, perhaps, in areas (the internal social climates of schools, for example) where these leaders seem unlikely to be well informed. Consequently, we regard the consistent trends reported

here as useful tentative indicators of what is probably happening, and especially as identifying the effects we must explore more conclusively by other methods. We need not place final reliance on the reports of key informants concerning enrollment changes, for example, since we may obtain and analyze year-by-year enrollment figures from individual schools. Similarly, we may explore the effects of the aid program on internal school administrative affairs by means of extensive interviews with the people most intimately involved. We intend to engage in much further research to explore the effects perceived by our key informants.

In the meantime, it may be instructive to summarize the general picture that emerges when we identify the most consistent trends reported above:

The effects of British Columbia's program of aid to independent schools, as described by our key informants, have been overwhelmingly positive thus far, though discomfort has occasionally been expressed with a few of the province's regulatory procedures, and some leaders are worried about possibilities in the future.

The aid apparently has done much to obliterate pessimism in many independent schools (mostly Catholic, apparently) that previously were threatened with obliteration. One wonders whether the sense of enormous relief in these schools fostered inattentiveness to dangers accompanying the aid, for leaders in these schools apparently accepted the money quite readily, and did not hesitate to allocate it to basic operating funds (mostly for teacher salaries), thus making it unlikely that their schools could withdraw from the program if that seemed advisable in the future. Similarly, they have urged that the level of provincial support be raised dramatically. In other respects as

well, there is not much evidence of wariness by leaders of these schools concerning the possible negative outcomes of the provincial aid. One possible explanation is that their schools were in such dire need they were in no position to be cautious.

In independent schools that were in some fiscal jeopardy before the introduction of the public aid, but nevertheless were maintaining a somewhat even keel, it appears that the aid released energies and discretionary money for many functions previously neglected, such as planning, coordination, public relations, the development of curriculum materials, the broadening of course offerings, the purchase of additional materials, and, indirectly, the improvement and expansion of facilities. In general these schools seem to have been cautious about the acceptance and use of the aid. It was accepted only after considerable dissension and debate, and has been used, quite deliberately, in ways that appear non-addictive--for a little of this and a little of that, rather than as the main source of funds for any critical component of the operating budget. Leaders in these schools have objected to several provincial influences associated with the aid thus far, are worried about others, and are actively entertaining the possibility that regulations attached to the aid in the future may mean their schools must withdraw from the program to maintain their distinctive identities.

The most affluent independent schools apparently have been the most wary of all, perhaps because they can afford to be wary. They have used the provincial funds almost entirely for bursaries and scholarships, and thus have not become dependent on them. They have indicated opposition to increases in the aid, worried about the loss of freedom that may prove the inevitable trade-off.

One highly placed independent school leader suggests that internal administrative procedures in independent schools have been profoundly altered by the aid program. In our 1980 survey, a few independent school principals reported a diminution of their freedom to operate their schools as they thought best. There is widespread anxiety in some independent school circles that harmful new regulation may be imposed if the left-leaning New Democratic Party returns to power in British Columbia's forthcoming election.

To scholars who attempted to predict changes in the income levels of parents to whom independent schools will be accessible if public aid is given, it should be interesting that very little of British Columbia's aid has "passed through" to families, with the exception of the beneficiaries of the bursaries and scholarships in the high-tuition schools. In Catholic schools, the funds have been used almost entirely to increase teacher salaries. In the other church-related schools, the funds have been used for improvements in a broad range of areas.

There is little evidence in the reports of our key informants concerning notable effects of the aid program on public schools. During the period of the aid program, criticism of public schools may have intensified, and independent schools may have enjoyed increasing public awareness and respect, but these tendencies seem equally evident elsewhere in Canada and the United States. Nevertheless, public school leaders (to the extent that our small samples may be trusted at all) seem somewhat resentful of the aid, and somewhat fearful of general enrollment losses, and particularly of selective enrollment losses, that they may suffer in the future because of the expansion and possible increased academic selectivity of independent

schools.

Finally, it is interesting that none of our key informants have spoken of negative effects of the aid program on the internal social climates of independent schools. The few comments made in this particularly have all been positive, indicating, for example, that the enthusiasm and involvement of parents have not diminished, and may even have increased. One alert is signalled, however, by the few reports that donations to the independent schools declined during this period. The lack of comment in this area is not particularly surprising. We know from other studies that school executives are often profoundly uninformed concerning the social climates of their schools. For reliable data in these respects, we must turn to students, teachers, and parents, as we will do in another report.